



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

Dear School Superintendent:

Ensuring the nutritional quality and safety of meals served to children participating in the National School Lunch Program continues to be a top priority for the Department of Agriculture (USDA). As part of the 2002 Farm Bill, Congress directed USDA to permit the use of approved food safety technology for food purchased for the National School Lunch Program. This includes irradiation. I wish to take a moment to explain how this Congressional directive is being implemented, and how it affects your food service program.

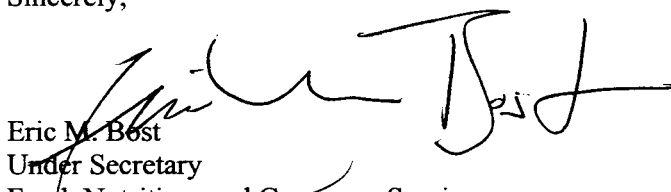
Beginning January 2004, USDA will offer commodity irradiated ground beef as a choice, along with non-irradiated ground beef, for delivery to schools. Your State will be sent irradiated product only if you order it. You will know if the commodity ground beef you receive is irradiated by both the word "Irradiated" as well as the international symbol for irradiation, the "Radura", printed on the case label.

To help your school community make an informed choice on the ordering of irradiated ground beef, you are strongly encouraged to engage in an educational effort on food irradiation before ordering irradiated product. You are being provided with the enclosed brochure based on scientific information to help in that endeavor. This same brochure may be found at <http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/Safety/FNSFoodSafety.htm> for your convenience to print and use. Other opinions and issues related to irradiation can be found at various organizations' websites such as those enclosed with this mailing. In addition, a school community food safety educational campaign, which includes partnership strategies, consumer education, training and other materials, is currently being developed and tested in the State of Minnesota. USDA will make these available for your use in Fall 2003 and will notify your State Department of Education of their availability.

Finally, and very importantly, should you choose to serve irradiated ground beef in your program, you are strongly encouraged to inform students and parents in order to allow them the choice of consuming irradiated products or not. This communication should be through a combination of mechanisms such as a letter to parents at the beginning of the school year, posting on your website, indications on the monthly menu of which products are irradiated, and signage on the serving line.

Thank you for your cooperation, as we work together to protect the safety of our schoolchildren. Please e-mail any questions you may have to schoolbeef@fns.usda.gov.

Sincerely,



Eric M. Best
Under Secretary
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services

Enclosures

cc: District School Food Service Director

Websites Offering Information on Irradiation

The U.S. Government and Congress support irradiation as a food safety technology that can assist schools in providing safe meals to children. However, there are a number of other organizations that have information and perspectives to offer on this issue, some of which may even argue against irradiation. We are providing a variety of sources for schools to access for their information and preparation to deal with the public, however, this is not an exhaustive list.

Governmental Organizations

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/hotirrad.htm>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

<http://www.fda.gov/opacom/catalog/irradbro.html>

U.S. Government Gateway to Food Safety

<http://www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/irradiat.html>

Nongovernmental Organizations

American Council on Science and Health

<http://www.acsh.org/press/releases/lunches060203.html>

American Dietetic Association

http://www.webdietitians.org/Public/Other/index_adap0200.cfm

American Medical Association

http://www.ama-assn.org/apps/pf_online/pf_online?f_n=browse&doc=policyfiles/HOD/H-150.961.HTM

American School Food Service Association

<http://www.asfsa.org/newsroom/sfsnews/irradbeefspecs.asp>

Center for Consumer Research

<http://ccr.ucdavis.edu/irr/index.shtml>

National Environmental Health Association

http://www.neha.org/position_papers/positionfood.html

Organic Consumers Association

<http://www.organicconsumers.org/irradlink.html>

Public Citizen

<http://www.citizen.org/cmep>